MICHIGAN WORKS! Southwest
Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo & St. Joseph Counties

Workforce Development Board
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www.michiganworkssouthwest.org

Disability Awareness Resource Team (DART)
Meeting Minutes
September 16, 2025

CALL TO ORDER – DART Chair, Hank Bostic, called the meeting to order at 2:04 p.m. at the Upjohn Institute, 300 S. Westnedge Avenue, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Hank Bostic (DNSW)
Elissa Ellis (APRIL)[V]
John Fiore (MRS)
Debbie Horn (MWSW)
Alvin Littel (KRESA)[V]
Ramona Lumpkin (Recovery Inst) [V]
Katie McCuen (KRESA)
Michelle Miller Adams (Upjohn)[V]
Sarah Pohl (MWSW)
Rhasheda Shepherd (ACA)[V]
Jessica Souter (ISK) [V]
Amanda Sutherland (KRESA)

[V] Attended virtually

APPROVAL OF AGENDA
The DART meeting agenda for September 16, 2025, was approved by consensus of members present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES
The DART meeting minutes of April 8, 2025, were approved by consensus of members present.

INTRODUCTIONS
Members present in person and online introduced themselves.

PROGRAM
Elissa Ellis from The Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) presented to the group virtually. Ms. Ellis reported that APRIL is a national nonprofit organization representing over 260 members and is focused on supporting individuals with disabilities in rural America. Its mission is to promote equity through advocacy, education, and collaboration. APRIL values diversity and aims to reflect inclusivity within its community. Additionally, APRIL offers technical assistance to its members, helping them with virtual events, independent living skills training, and youth program development, ensuring they have the resources needed to serve their communities effectively.

Following the presentation, a discussion ensued regarding the significant challenges associated with transportation. Members expressed a need for more comprehensive information on effectively addressing the unique transportation needs of individuals with disabilities. It was suggested that identifying potential partners, such as local churches, and negotiating reasonable rates could prove beneficial. Specific regions with successful transportation services were highlighted as examples. Hank Bostic mentioned his involvement

in developing a voucher plan and indicated that he will provide further details as the study progresses. He aims to present the plan to this group once it reaches a more conclusive stage.

AGENCY UPDATES

KRESA – Katie McCuen reported that the summer internship programs have successfully concluded, and they are looking forward to the spring cohorts. Youth participants are benefiting from dual enrollment opportunities at the Career Connect Campus, enhancing their educational experience. Furthermore, industry tours are set to commence soon, providing participants with valuable insights into various careers.

Amanda Sutherland reported that MyCITY sessions for paid work experience and internships have currently concluded in Kalamazoo but are still being offered in St. Joseph and Branch counties, with plans to resume in all areas in January. There is currently room for enrollment in MyCITY for out-of-school youth programs and limited spots for in-school youth in St. Joseph and Branch, so referrals for candidates are welcome. Ms. Sutherland further noted that, despite ongoing budget uncertainties, services will continue with minimal disruption.

Questions should be directed to Katie McCuen at katie.mccuen@kresa.org or Amanda Sutherland at amanda.sutherland@kresa.org.

Disability Network https://www.dnswm.org/ - Hank Bostic reported that the Disability Network is collaborating with other agencies to create a transportation plan, which includes a transportation voucher system that he supports. As more details are available, he will be willing bring them to the DART Committee. Additional information about services is as follows:

- Information regarding a *Translation Services Resource* (including ASL) is available at Boost Lingo https://boostlingo.com/
- Many support groups are offered in-person and online; additional information can be found on the Disability Network website at Support Groups.
- All information can be found on the updated website – http://www.dnswm.org/.
- *Community Education Events* are posted on the Disability Network Southwest website at https://www.dnswm.org/events/
- *Ramp Up* – Ramps provide greater independence and safety for people with mobility disabilities and allow them to remain living at home. The Ramp Up program works with funders and coordinates builders and volunteer organizations to provide ramps for those in need throughout Southwest Michigan. These ramps help people connect to resources for constructing ramps on private residences. For more info, contact Hank Bostic bostich@dnswm.org.
- *Disability Network Services* include Advocacy & Education, Information & Referral, Independent Living, Transition, and Peer Support. More information is available on the website at https://www.dnswm.org/services_menu/
- *Hours* – Office hours in Kalamazoo are Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Friday's hours are by phone by calling 269-345-1516. The Battle Creek office phone number is 269-345-1516, and the St. Joseph office phone number is 269-985-0111.

Recovery Institute https://www.recoverymi.org/ *Peer to Peer Services* are available through weekly meetings, which are held at the Recovery Institute, Monday through Thursday, and there is open studio time on Fridays. The *Calendar of Activities* is available online at https://www.recoverymi.org/ri-calendar.

Integrated Services Kalamazoo https://iskzoo.org/ - Jessica Souter reported that the Action Employment Services program assists individuals with physical or mental impairments, focusing on adults and youth aged 16 and older connected to ISK services. It is important to note that ISK is a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic that offers services for individuals who are not enrolled in Medicaid. ISK provides comprehensive services such as case management, therapy, and peer support to anyone in Kalamazoo County with a behavioral health condition. Additionally, ISK offers job coaching and follow-up support to assist individuals in achieving their employment goals.

- The *Urgent Care and Access Center* is located at 440 W. Kalamazoo Avenue, and it is open 24/7. For more information, call (269) 373-6000 or (888) 373-6200 or visit https://iskzoo.org/all-services/.
- *Schedule Appointments* - Customers can schedule appointments for non-urgent routine assessments or drop in Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. For planning purposes, she recommended blocking two hours for appointments.
- The Crosstown Integrated Services location is a *Psychiatric Center,* and information is available at https://iskzoo.org/?s=psychiatric+center.

KRESA Transition Services https://www.kresa.org/domain/58 - Alvin Littel reported that there are a few updates as the new school year begins. The primary focus over the past month has been on establishing connections with local coordinators and agencies to facilitate the upcoming activities and support for the school year.

Michigan Rehabilitation Services – John Fiore reported the following:

- Summer work experience has been completed, and Mr. Fiore reported a successful season with increased participation over last year.
- Due to the lack of a state budget as the fiscal year's end approaches, MRS is preparing for a potential closure. A stopgap measure will be put into place to ensure minimal customer impact.
- There will be a statewide expansion of a customized employment pilot, a new job exploration and placement model distinct from existing methods, and they are seeking certified organizations to provide this service. Mr. Fiore invited organizations interested in providing this service to reach out to him directly for further discussion.
- MRS welcomes individuals with disabilities who are interested in employment and seeking training opportunities, whether vocational or college-based.
- *Referrals* - If you are, or know of, a person with a disability facing barriers to advancement, a case can be opened to address those obstacles. For more information, contact John Fiore at fiorej@michigan.gov.

MI Works! Southwest – Sarah Pohl reported that, like others, Michigan Works! Southwest is awaiting updates on the state budget. In the meantime, a contingency plan is being developed in case negotiations are delayed. Operations will continue as usual for now, unless any significant changes occur.

EMERGING ISSUES RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT & ADVOCACY

Michelle Miller-Adams proposed that early work experiences, such as internships or summer jobs, significantly enhance job prospects for individuals with disabilities in the future. Ms. Miller-Adams noted that many parents are unaware of available opportunities in the community. She reminded

the group that last spring, a discussion took place at the DART meeting about compiling a comprehensive list of these opportunities for parents. Those in attendance agreed to reconvene at the November meeting to brainstorm solutions to these challenges and possibly designate a work group to spearhead this project.

UNIQUE CUSTOMER NEEDS
Michigan Works! Southwest requested information regarding resources for an ASL translator to support a participant requiring ongoing assistance in Kalamazoo County. A variety of resources were provided, including the use of Boostlingo for interpretation services. Further discussions were held concerning the specific needs of this participant.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
A list of professional development opportunities was included on the agenda, and members shared other opportunities. The professional development opportunities were as follows:

- Disability Network Southwest Michigan http://www.dnswm.org/
- KPL ONEplace https://www.kpl.gov/oneplace/
- The Synergy Health Center https://synergykzoo.org/
- Incompass Michigan –https://incompassmi.org/ - see the Education & Training tab
- DART Desktop Training Modules https://www.michiganworkssouthwest.org/resources/at-your-desktop-training
- Michigan Works! Association Professional Development https://www.michiganworks.org/professional-development

ANNOUNCEMENTS
Michigan Rehabilitation Services will be partnering with Incompass Michigan to facilitate the re:con conference in Kalamazoo, scheduled for November 5, 2025.

Further details, including a link for additional information, were emailed to the group on Tuesday, September 23, 2025.

NEXT MEETING
The next DART meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 13, 2025, from 2:00 - 3:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT
The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

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Debbie Horn, Policy and Program Trainer
Michigan Works! Southwest

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